



BUILDING A BRAND

In Alabama, the name Lake Majestik Farms is synonymous with Brangus cattle.

When Nic Cornelison purchased some cattle from his cousin 12 years ago, he didn't realize he was about to develop a new passion.

"I bought my cousin's Brangus herd without any real knowledge of the breed," says the northeastern Alabama cattleman.

Cornelison already had a number of interests in addition to the farm. With his father, Royce, he owns a commercial construction company. The family also raises hunting dogs and is heavily involved in their church and the community of Flat Rock, Ala.

But he soon was smitten by his new black cattle.

"When I put those cows in with my commercial Angus herd, I quickly noticed that the Brangus looked better and outperformed the other cattle," he says.

Cornelison became a Brangus convert, and over the past decade his Lake Majestik Farms brand has become synonymous with the Brangus breed, created by a three-eighths Brahman and five-eighths Angus cross.

Now close to 1,000 head of purebred and commercial black cattle graze Lake Majestik's gently rolling pastures.

Hot Weather-Hardy

To the casual observer, full-blooded Brahman cattle, with their characteristic shoulder hump and floppy ears, are

distinctive and memorable, if not a little odd and exotic. Cornelison points out why Brahman, when combined with Angus, yields cattle that perform well for him.

"The breed originated from very hot, humid places in the world," he says. "This has given them the ability to withstand very oppressive weather when other breeds can't. In the hottest part of the day in the Alabama summertime, Brangus will be out in the pasture grazing when other cattle are standing in the pond or bunched up in the shade."

He also appreciates the insect tolerance of the Brahman breed, which is a descendant of Indian *Bos indicus* cattle.

"Flies, parasites and other types of insects don't bother Brangus the way they do other breeds," Cornelison explains. As a result, pink eye — typically spread by face flies — is not a problem in his herd.

Meanwhile, the Angus genetics contribute good temperament and positive carcass qualities to the breed, yielding high-quality beef cuts that Cornelison is proud to sell locally.

NIC CORNELISON

Photos by Mark Johnson

"They have really done a lot for not only the Brangus industry, but for this entire area. They've been excellent caretakers of a lot of land around here."

— Jason Thomas,
Alabama Farm Credit

A few years ago, Lake Majestik Farms began supplying superior cuts of Brangus beef to butcher shops and restaurants in Alabama and across the border in Tennessee, where it's even highlighted on certain menus. Customers also can purchase Lake Majestik's USDA-inspected Farm-Fresh Beef at the farm.

Top Genetics

However, it is Cornelison's breeding program that has raised the farm's profile within the Brangus industry. By carefully collecting data at multiple points during a calf's development and ultra-sound scanning yearlings for intermuscular fat, ribeye size and back fat, Cornelison has created a herd that displays top genetics.

"We sell bulls anywhere from \$3,000 to \$50,000, and market semen and embryos across the globe," he says. "This has made Lake Majestik a destination for cattle producers, and we're often hosting tour groups."

This interest has created what Cornelison describes as "unexpected" growth in the



The Cornelison family, left to right: Chasity, Paris, Nic and Briley

company. In the 10 years or so since he began breeding Brangus on their property, he and his father, Royce, have increased their numbers from about 60 cows to a herd of 973 head of cattle. This includes 343 registered Brangus and the remainder in commercial animals.

With the support of the Athens branch of Alabama Farm Credit, the Lake Majestik property has expanded to 4,600 acres in northeast Alabama, 2,700 of which is dedicated to pasture.

Alabama Farm Credit Vice President and Branch Manager Jason Thomas calls the Cornelisons “great customers and great members.”

“They have really done a lot for not only the Brangus industry, but for this entire area,” says Thomas. “They’ve been excellent caretakers of a lot of land around here.”

A Large Employer

Combined, Lake Majestik and the Cornelisons’ P&C Construction employ 57 full-time employees, making them one of the community’s

largest employers. The family has placed hundreds of acres of prime land into conservation easements that will protect it in perpetuity from commercial development, such as surface mining. Cornelison says that in the next five to 10 years, he would love for the farm to become his full-time career.

“Working with my cattle and being home on the farm is what I love most,” says the cattleman who, with his wife of 18 years, Chasity, has two children — daughter Paris, 13, and son Briley, 11. “We do more than just raise cattle here. Chasity grows and cans an enormous amount of vegetables, most of which goes to people in the community who need it most. We raise and sell German shorthair and Labrador retriever hunting dogs, and the kids show cattle competitively and love to hunt and fish.

“Frankly,” he says, “I consider myself a very lucky guy.” ■ MJ

Brangus cattle are synonymous with the Lake Majestik Farms brand.



CONSTRUCTING FUTURES

Several years ago, Nic and Royce Cornelison noticed a decline in the availability of skilled carpenters in Northeastern Alabama.

“The average age of a carpenter these days is around 62,” says Nic. “It’s just becoming more and more difficult to find young people who are willing to learn a trade like that, and it’s a problem. We need quality, skilled people in the construction industry.”

To help remedy the problem, the Cornelisons, who own P&C Construction, began working with the Earnest Pruett Center of Technology in Scottsboro and Northeast Alabama Community College to develop a carpentry program to train young people.

“You can go through a six-week program and learn how to cut angles, how different materials go together, and so on,” says Nic, who serves as vice chairman of the Association of General Contractors of East Tennessee. “You can also participate in a two-year program and follow that up with a construction management degree from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

“If they are really working hard at it, a student can leave the program and move directly into a commercial construction supervisor position which could potentially pay upwards of six figures,” he says.

Although the programs are still being developed, Nic says he is encouraged by the possibilities.

“We’re thrilled to be able to offer some of our local young people another option for a great career,” he says. ■ MJ